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Letter to Chief State School Officers regarding using federal funds to improve student outcomes in the humanities

July 13, 2016

Dear Colleague,

Ensuring that all students have access to a well-rounded education is central to our shared work to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students and prepare them to succeed in college, careers, and life.

A holistic education—one that includes access to social studies, including: history, civics, government, economics, and geography; music and art; world languages; sciences, including: physics, chemistry, computer science, and biology; physical and health education; career and technical education (CTE); and rigorous coursework of all types—allows educators to teach their students in a manner that promotes the promise of learning and provides students with the knowledge necessary to succeed in a complex society. The benefits of a holistic education demonstrate that, in addition to the core subjects of English/language arts and mathematics, access to a broad range of coursework is essential for students in today's world.

On April 13, 2016, the U. S. Department of Education (Department) issued a Dear Colleague Letter to State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, and other stakeholders discussing how to maximize Federal funds to support and enhance innovative science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) [1]education for all students. Much as that letter provides a roadmap for

using Federal funds to support STEM education, this letter is designed to help SEAs, LEAs, schools, and their partners understand ways that Federal formula grant funds may support humanities-based educational strategies in the 2016–2017 school year under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law, reauthorizing the ESEA. SEAs, LEAs, and their partners may find this guidance useful as they contemplate the transition from the ESEA as amended by NCLB to the ESEA as amended by the ESSA.[2]

For the purposes of this letter, we broadly define "humanities education" to include social studies, including: history, civics, government, economics, and geography; literature; art; music; and philosophy; as well as other non-STEM subjects that are not generally covered by an English/language arts curriculum.

To help SEAs, LEAs, and their partners identify potential ways to use Federal formula grant funds to support humanities education during the 2016–2017 school year, this letter provides examples of how funds from Titles I, II, III, IV, and V of the ESEA, as amended by NCLB, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins) can support efforts to improve Pre-K–12 and postsecondary instruction and student outcomes in the humanities.[3]

To enhance the impact of humanities education programs and maximize the impact of available Federal resources, it is often necessary for SEAs, LEAs, and schools to leverage various sources of support. For example, an SEA or LEA may use Title I funds to purchase humanities-focused materials, devices, or digital learning resources to improve learning outcomes among low-achieving students;[4] Title II funds to provide professional development to educators on humanities-focused concepts and approaches to humanities instruction; Title III funds to provide supplemental humanities-focused resources specifically developed for English learners; IDEA funds

to meet the unique educational needs of children with disabilities in humanities-focused courses, consistent with their individualized education programs (IEPs); and Perkins funds to develop humanities-related CTE programs of study, including, for example, in the Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communications career cluster. In addition, through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, authorized under Title IV, Part B of the ESEA, as amended by NCLB, an SEA may award subgrants to LEAs, community-based organizations, or other public or private entities to provide students with the opportunity to engage in authentic humanities-focused content that aligns with their school day and to focus on hands-on, humanities-rich experiences. All uses of Federal resources must comply with applicable laws and requirements for each funding source.

I hope the examples and other information included in this letter will support your efforts to provide all students with access to high-quality humanities programs and resources that will improve learning and achievement while fostering strong connections between what students are learning and who they become.

Sincerely,
/s/
John B. King, Jr.

Examples of Leveraging ESEA, IDEA, and Perkins Funds for Humanities Education for School Year 2016–2017

In order to provide all students with access to a holistic education, the Department encourages educators at every level to pursue innovative strategies and teaching methods in the humanities while working to ensure equitable educational opportunities across the humanity disciplines. For the purposes of this letter, the "humanities" broadly include social studies, including: history, civics, government, economics, and geography; literature; art; music; and philosophy; as well as other non-STEM subjects that are not generally covered by an English/language arts curriculum. To improve humanities educational opportunities for all students, this letter provides examples that

illustrate how grantees may use funds made available under the ESEA, as amended by NCLB; IDEA; and Perkins.

The use of funds under any grant program must be consistent with the requirements of the program. The examples below highlight ways in which a grantee may use Federal funds in the 2016–2017 school year to support humanities education by:

1. Increasing student access to humanities courses and experiences, including out-of-school programs, humanities-themed schools, and career pathways;
2. Supporting the knowledge and expertise in the humanity disciplines of school educators through recruitment, preparation, support, and retention
3. ncreasing student access to materials and equipment needed to support inquiry-based pedagogy and active learning.

ESEA statutory references in the examples below are to the ESEA, as amended by NCLB.

Increase student access to humanities courses and experiences, including out-of-school programs, humanities-themed schools, and career pathways: To help ensure that all students have access to a full range of learning opportunities in the humanities, schools, LEAs, and SEAs may use Federal funds to support increased access to these opportunities both during the school day and during out-of-school time.

1. **Rigorous coursework in humanities for all students**: Depending on the student population to be served, program funds may be used to enhance college and career readiness through support for dual- or concurrent-enrollment programs, early college high school models, or other methods to increase access to rigorous humanities coursework. Schools and LEAs may utilize Federal funds to support humanities coursework in ways such as the following:
   a. Schools may use Title I funds to increase the rigor of humanities coursework for students attending a school operating a Title I schoolwide program, consistent with the school's comprehensive needs assessment **[5]** (ESEA section 1114);
   b. LEAs may use Title III funds to serve English learners who need supplemental English language instruction activities in humanities courses (ESEA section 3115);

c. LEAs may use IDEA funds to serve eligible students with disabilities who require college coursework in order to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE),**[6]** or who need additional services and supports in humanities courses to access the general education curriculum (IDEA section 602, section 1411, section 1412, section 1413, and section 1414).

2. **Out-of-school time:** SEAs and their subgrantees (*e.g.*, LEAs, community-based organizations, and other public and private entities) may use funds from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants to provide high-quality humanities programs and activities to students in out-of-school learning settings (ESEA section 4201).
3. **Career-based experiential learning:** Grantees may use Perkins funds to support collaborations with humanities industries, for example, in the Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communications industries, to offer internships, apprenticeships, and mentoring programs that improve students' knowledge of careers in the humanities to the extent such careers are part of a grantee's career and technical education program (Perkins section 135).
4. **Humanities-focused schools and pathways:** Eligible applicants may use Charter Schools Program funds to start new humanities-focused charter schools (ESEA section 5204).
5. **Summer school or extended learning time:** Schools may use Title I funds to help prepare low-achieving students to take advanced humanities courses in high school — for example, providing an intensive summer school course designed to accelerate their knowledge and skills, offering an elective course to prepare them to take advanced courses, or providing after-school tutoring while they are taking advanced courses. (ESEA section 1114 and section 4201).
6. **Field trips:** Schools operating a schoolwide program may use Title I funds to support activities such as field trips to increase access to hands-on humanities experiences and activities. Such uses must be consistent with applicable SEA or LEA policies, Federal requirements for uses of funds, and the school's comprehensive needs assessment (ESEA section 1114).

Support the knowledge and expertise in the humanity disciplines of school educators through recruitment, preparation, support, and retention: Educators have an incredible impact on student learning and engagement. To help envision ways Federal resources may be utilized to support the development of humanities educators, SEAs, LEAs, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and their partners may consider the following:

1. **Recruiting and preparing novice humanities educators, including those from groups historically underrepresented in the humanities:** Some examples of how Title II funds may be used for this purpose include:
2. Providing financial incentives, where necessary, to recruit effective humanities educators to teach in high-need schools (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123); and
3. Recruiting qualified individuals with humanities content knowledge, but who are working in other fields, to become humanities teachers (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123).
4. **Helping educators to learn effective ways to improve teaching of humanities:** Some examples include the following uses of Federal funds:
5. Title II funds to provide professional learning opportunities to teachers or principals. Examples include sustained relevant professional development opportunities offered by nonacademic humanities institutions, such as museums or nonprofits (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123);
6. Title II funds to support educators, including through professional development activities, as they implement new courses, such as civics and art history (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123);
7. Title II and IDEA funds to support educators to effectively teach students with disabilities in humanities subjects (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123 and IDEA section 611, section 612, section 613, and section 614).
8. Title II and Title III funds to provide supplemental support to educators to effectively teach English learners in humanities subjects (ESEA section 2113, section 2123, and section 3115);
9. Title II funds to support elementary teachers, including preschool educators, to incorporate the humanities into their classrooms and to utilize effective humanities pedagogy in their teaching, which may be done through mentoring or other professional development activities (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123); and
10. Perkins funds reserved by the State for leadership activities related to the purposes of the Perkins Act to offer internships related to humanities programs of study, including, for example, in the Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communications careers, that provide valuable work experience, which may include internship programs that provide relevant business experience, for secondary and postsecondary teachers, faculty, administrators, and career guidance and academic counselors who are involved in integrated CTE programs (Perkins section 124).
11. **Supporting leadership pathways for humanities educators:** Some examples of how Title II funds may be used for this purpose include:

12. Hiring humanities coaches to help LEAs tailor professional learning to the needs of individual educators. For example, coaches may help educators to bolster their humanities content knowledge or expand humanities pedagogy to include problem- or project-based active learning techniques (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123); and
13. Providing differential or incentive pay for teachers, principals, or school leaders in high-need subject areas, such as certain humanities subjects, to serve in high-need schools, or to reward the work of teachers and leaders who have demonstrated effectiveness in improving student outcomes in the humanities (ESEA section 2113 and section 2123).

Increase student access to materials and equipment needed to support inquiry-based pedagogy and active learning: Supporting students in humanities learning can require additional resources and technologies; SEAs, LEAs, and other grantees may consider the following:

1. **Devices:** Federal funds may be used by grantees to purchase devices for students to access materials and general instruction and to collaborate with peers and educators to support humanities learning.
2. Providing students with mobile learning devices to support learning, including instruction in humanities courses: Schools operating a Title I schoolwide program may use Title I funds to acquire devices, such as tablets and laptops, as part of a comprehensive plan to upgrade the educational program of a school, consistent with the school's comprehensive needs assessment (ESEA section 1114); and
3. Providing students with disabilities with assistive technology devices: SEAs may use IDEA, Part B section 611 funds they retain for authorized State-level activities, other than administration, to improve the use of technology in the classroom for students with disabilities, in order to enhance their learning.**[7]** LEAs may use IDEA, Part B funds to enable students with disabilities to participate in humanities courses, if the IEP specifies that the student requires an assistive technology device (IDEA section 611, section 612, section 613, section 614, and section 619).
4. **Supporting English learners:** LEAs may use Title III funds to improve instruction for English learners by acquiring supplementary digital learning resources and software that will support English learners' acquisition of English proficiency and humanities content proficiency, including materials in languages other than English (ESEA section 3115).

These are just a few examples of allowable uses of Federal funds that may support the development, implementation, and expansion of humanities approaches to help improve student achievement in the 2016–2017 school year. To identify further opportunities, please review the statutes, regulations, and guidance for each Federal program.

Information about the ESSA

The ESSA, which reauthorizes the ESEA, prioritizes excellence and equity.**[8]** For additional information, resources, and guidance, please visit http://www.ed.gov/essa. The ESSA emphasizes access to a holistic, high-quality education for all students. In particular, the newly authorized Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants program in Title IV, Part A, Subpart 1 of the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, is designed to improve academic achievement by increasing State and local capacity to, among other goals, "provide all students with access to a well-rounded education."**[9]** The Department looks forward to supporting SEAs, LEAs, schools, and their partners as they endeavor to ensure that the definition of an excellent education includes access to high-quality humanities coursework for all students.

Footnotes

1. For the purposes of this letter, consistent with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), all references to STEM include computer science.**[Return to text]**

2. In general, consistent with the ESSA effective date provisions as clarified by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, fiscal year (FY) 2016 formula grant funds under the ESEA will be awarded and administered in accordance with the ESEA as in effect on the day before the date of enactment of the ESSA (*i.e.*, ESEA as amended by NCLB). For additional information regarding FY 2016 ESEA formula grant funds, see the Department's Dear Colleague Letter of January 28, 2016, at: www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/transitionsy1617-dcl.pdf.

   [Return to text]

3. Although the examples provided in this letter are limited to the ESEA, as amended by NCLB, Perkins, and IDEA, funds from other formula and competitive grant programs administered by the Department may also be used to support humanities education. Also, references to possible uses of IDEA and Perkins funds apply beyond the 2016–2017 school year.**[Return to text]**
4. Schools operating a Title I schoolwide program under the ESEA may use Title I, Part A funds to support humanities-focused coursework as part of a comprehensive plan to upgrade the educational program of the entire school, consistent with the school's comprehensive needs assessment.**[Return to text]**
5. For additional guidance on Title I eligibility, please visit www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html. **[Return to text]**
6. Under Part B of the IDEA, if the IEP Team determines that services in a community, technical, or other postsecondary program are necessary to assist the secondary school student in reaching his or her postsecondary goals and receiving FAPE, and those services are considered secondary school education under State law, the student's IEP Team could designate those as transition services and the school district could pay for those services with IDEA, Part B funds. Information regarding the possible use of IDEA funds for this purpose is available at: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/11-007493r-co-dude-transition9-3-13.pdf.**[Return to text]**
7. These improvements should include technology with universal design principles and assistive technology devices, to maximize accessibility to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Note that public schools must provide accessible technology to students with disabilities, as required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Under these laws, public schools are also required to make humanities courses available to students with disabilities, if those courses are available to other students. These requirements apply regardless of whether IDEA funds are used to provide the accessible technology. **[Return to text]**
8. Under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, funds provided for non-competitive formula grant programs authorized by the ESEA for use during academic year 2016-2017 must be administered in accordance with the ESEA as amended by the NCLB. **[Return to text]**
9. Under section 8101(52) of the ESEA as amended by the ESSA, the term "well-rounded education" means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history,

geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience. **[Return to text]**

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